



**US Army Corps
of Engineers®**

DRAFT

140900June2007



For Immediate Release
June 20, 2007

CONTACTS: Maryland DNR - Tom O'Connell, 410-693-8075
Virginia DNR - Jack Travelstead, 757-247-2247
Corps of Engineers - Mark Mansfield, 757-201-7764

Draft EIS delayed

Oyster EIS Team releases Progress Report

NORFOLK, VA... The team evaluating alternatives to significantly increase the population of oysters throughout the Chesapeake Bay has released a comprehensive Progress Report. The report is published in lieu of the anticipated May/June 2007 release of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), the completion of which has been delayed by challenges in developing a native oyster demographic model that, when completed, will establish a framework for evaluating the environmental consequences of the EIS

The Progress Report provides general background on the origin and focus of the EIS, a description of the proposed action and alternatives under evaluation, an overview of the major project components, the status of current efforts, and milestones that still need to be achieved before a Draft EIS can be released for public review. It also provides a detailed review of several predictive tools that have been or are being developed to provide a sound scientific basis for comparing the consequences of the study's proposed action and the alternatives.

The EIS's Goal

The scientific findings of the EIS are expected to be the driver for determining the future direction for restoring and managing the Chesapeake Bay's oyster resources, whether native, non-native or combined solutions. The specific goal of the EIS is to evaluate alternatives for establishing an oyster population in the Chesapeake Bay that reaches levels comparable to those during the period 1920 to 1970. The objective is to restore the ecological role of oysters in the Bay as well as the socioeconomic benefits of a commercial oyster fishery. The EIS is evaluating the environmental consequences of continuing and expanding restoration efforts for the native Eastern oyster (*C. virginica*), implementation of a temporary oyster harvest moratorium, introducing the non-native Suminoe oyster (*C. ariakensis*), and establishing a large-scale native and/or non-native oyster aquaculture industry.

Developing native oyster model is key to scientific basis of EIS

Last January, the Oyster EIS Executive Committee, in coordination with the cooperating federal agencies and Potomac River Fisheries Commission, announced the May/June 2007 target date for publishing a Draft EIS. While significant progress has been made on all of the critical elements of the EIS since January, the release of the Draft EIS has been delayed by the necessity to develop several predictive tools that are required to provide a sound scientific basis for comparing the consequences of the EIS's proposed action and the alternatives. A key to this has been developing a native oyster demographic model. The challenge in organizing and analyzing the available native oyster data to develop this model is the primary reason for this delay.

Timely issuance of a Draft EIS is of critical importance to all parties. Of even greater importance, however, are the completeness and scientific validity of the document due to the complexity of the issues that must be addressed and the irreversibility of some of the potential actions if implemented. Taking particular care in completing the scientific studies and modeling is critical. The careful preparation of the EIS has required the participation of a large number of stakeholders, the integration of findings and contributions from many sources, complete documentation of all data and information to be incorporated, and detailed and rigorous quality control and peer review.

-more-

Progress Report on Oyster EIS

2-2-2-2-2

Major milestones to complete the Draft Oyster EIS

Several significant steps remain to complete the Draft EIS. These include:

- Independent Oyster Advisory Panel (OAP) peer review of the native and nonnative oyster demographic model documentation. The panel is comprised of seven-members representing a broad range of non-partisan, scientific expertise and philosophies about marine resources.
- Completion of peer reviews of all individual EIS components, including research, modeling and assessments.
- Integration and completion of the ecological, economic and cultural analyses, that are dependent upon the demographic model output, to assess the consequences of the proposed action and alternatives.
- OAP peer review of the Draft EIS to advise the lead agencies on the sufficiency of the EIS and the degree of risk that would be involved with implementing each alternative based upon the available scientific information. This review will include an evaluation of any currently funded nonnative oyster research that is not yet complete.

Upcoming Events:

Oyster Advisory Panel meeting: The independent Oyster Advisory Panel will meet in an open working session in mid-July to review the native oyster demographic model and will, subsequently, present their assessment to the Oyster EIS Executive Committee. For additional information on the meeting, contact Tom O'Connell at 410-260-8295.

Oyster EIS Executive Committee meeting: In mid-July, the Executive Committee will meet, in closed session, with the cooperating federal agencies and Potomac River Fisheries Commission. The committee will review the status of the EIS and associated research, and assess the Oyster Advisory Panel's observations and recommendations in setting a course and timeline for the Draft EIS's future release.

The EIS Executive Committee is comprised of Maryland Department of Natural Resources Secretary John R. Griffin; Virginia Secretary of Natural Resources L. Preston Bryant, Jr.; and United States Army Corps of Engineers Norfolk District Commander, Colonel Dionysios Anninos. The cooperating federal agencies consist of the Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The Potomac River Fisheries Commission (PRFC) and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) are also partners in this effort.

For a copy of the Progress Report and additional information on the progress of the EIS, accomplishments to date, available scientific findings and upcoming meetings go to the EIS website at <http://www.dnr.state.md.us/dnrnews/infocus/oysters.asp>.

###

Additional links:

NOAA's Quarterly Non-native Oyster Research Review reports can be found online at <http://noaa.chesapeakebay.net/nonnativeoysterresearch.aspx>.